



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Believing Things Unknown

Citation for published version:

Mcglynn, A 2013, 'Believing Things Unknown', *Nous*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 385-407.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2011.00843.x>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1111/j.1468-0068.2011.00843.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2011.00843.x)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Nous

Publisher Rights Statement:

© McGlynn, A. (2013). Believing Things Unknown. *Nous*, 47(2), 385-407. 10.1111/j.1468-0068.2011.00843.x

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Believing Things Unknown

Aidan McGlynn

The Northern Institute of Philosophy, University of Aberdeen

Introduction

What is the relationship between belief and knowledge? On a traditional picture, knowledge is understood as belief that's both true and enjoys a certain epistemic pedigree. That was the core thought behind the tripartite analysis of knowledge, now almost universally regarded as sunk by Gettier (1963). But the thought has outlived the tripartite analysis in various forms, perhaps most prominently in the persistent assumption that knowledge should be understood as justified true belief plus some further condition designed to handle Gettier cases.¹

More recently, however, a number of epistemologists have tried to reverse the traditional picture of the relationship between belief and knowledge. This reversal comes in various forms. We find it claimed that belief is a kind of 'botched knowing' (Williamson, 2000, pp 47), that belief aims at knowledge rather than just truth, that knowledge is the norm of belief, and so on. My principal aim here is to cast doubt on these kinds of claims. I will argue that under certain conditions one can, without falling into irrationality or unreasonableness—without falling into incongruity, as

I'll say for short—believe P while believing that one doesn't know P. I'll also clarify the conditions under which this is possible. As we will see, this is a possibility that one cannot accommodate if one accepts the kinds of claims I wish to target.

I will proceed as follows. In section 1 I will argue that true beliefs in lottery propositions—that the lottery ticket one holds in one's hand has lost, for example—aren't merely true by luck even when held on purely probabilistic grounds. This is a topic of considerable independent interest, but the reason for its inclusion in the present discussion is that the point will prove significant for the sections that follow. In section 2 I will present a case constructed out of materials developed in section 1, about which the intuitively correct verdict is, I will suggest, that the subject both believes P and believes that she doesn't know P without falling into incongruity. That's a verdict that we might overturn upon being presented with a sufficiently well motivated thesis that entailed the contrary, and in the sections that follow I introduce a number of theses that have been proposed in the literature which have that consequence. In sections 3 through 6 I argue that even the most plausible of these theses lack any firm motivation, considering in turn the claims that we treat our beliefs as knowledge (section 3), that we are rationally committed to so treating our beliefs (section 4), that the norm of belief is the knowledge norm (section 5), and that belief aims at knowledge (section 6). My conclusion will be that we have been offered no good grounds on which to overturn our initial verdict on the case offered in section 2: that it stands as an example of congruous belief in something which the subject believes she doesn't know. Section 7 makes explicit my account of

the conditions under which this is possible, drawing on the conclusion of section 1 in order to argue that the crucial point is that the subject believes that it's not just a matter of luck that her belief gets things right. Finally, in sections 8 and 9 I will briefly consider three important applications of my position to recent controversies in epistemology: the first to epistemic variants of Moore's paradox (section 8), the second to a currently unfashionable response to scepticism suggested by Bertrand Russell in *The Problems of Philosophy*, and the third to the increasingly popular knowledge first approach to epistemology (both section 9).

1. Luck and Lotteries

Let us begin by considering the role of luck in lotteries. There are many significant asymmetries between winning a lottery and losing it. Perhaps most obviously, there can be a great financial asymmetry. But more interestingly for us, there seems to be an important asymmetry concerning the role that luck plays: although winning a large lottery is a matter of luck, losing one isn't. If one doesn't share this intuition, consider increasing the number of tickets in the draw without increasing the number of winning tickets, or consider some of the lottery variants discussed by Jonathan Vogel (1990) and John Hawthorne (2004): given my age, I would be very unlucky to die from a heart attack this year, but it's not a matter of luck if I don't; given how few cars are stolen in this city each night, it would be unlucky if mine were stolen tonight, but it's not a matter of luck if I awake to find it still parked in my driveway.

Isn't there a sense in which we might describe the lottery loser as unlucky? Yes, I think that must be conceded. This somewhat complicates but does not spoil the point of the previous paragraph. Sometimes 'lucky' and 'unlucky' are used interchangeably with 'fortunate' and 'unfortunate' respectively. On the plausible account of what it is for an event to be fortunate offered by Duncan Pritchard (2005, pp 144n15), an event is fortunate just in case it is favorable even though it was out of one's control (and likewise for an event to be unfortunate is for it to be unfavorable and out of one's control).² This yields one sense in which one can truly say that one is lucky (or unlucky) to have the parents one has, even if this is a metaphysical necessity. My point in the previous paragraph isn't spoiled by the concession that we may sometimes describe a lottery loss as unlucky, since the lottery loss is only unlucky in the sense of being unfortunate. To finesse the complication raised here, we may ask, as I will in my more careful moments, whether an event is *a matter of luck*, rather than whether it is lucky or unlucky. I claim, and I've found most people seem to agree, that the lottery loss is not a matter of luck, even if we would sometimes be prepared to say it was unlucky. Once we are careful to isolate the sense of 'luck' that is of primary relevance to epistemology, the asymmetry of the previous paragraph stands.

Although this asymmetry has been noticed in the literature on epistemic luck (see for instance Coffman (2007) and Levy (2009)), an immediate and important consequence seems to have been almost entirely overlooked.³ If my losing a large

lottery isn't a matter of luck, neither will it be a matter of luck that my belief that my ticket has lost is true. That is to say, if we take the asymmetry at face value, beliefs in lottery propositions aren't true by luck. So if such beliefs fail to constitute knowledge, as many epistemologists have argued or assumed, this is not because they can only be true by luck. For this reason it is a mistake to assimilate lottery cases too closely to standard Gettier cases, where there is a general consensus that the correct diagnosis of why the subject fails to know is that it is lucky that her belief is true. Even if we take lottery beliefs to be cases of justified true belief that fall short of knowledge (see Lewis, 1996, pp 551, Hawthorne, 2004, pp 9fn22, and Pritchard, 2008), we should not lose sight of the differences with standard Gettier cases concealed by that common description.⁴

What drives the thought that lottery propositions cannot be known before the announcement if not the claim that such a belief could only be true by luck? My own view, though this is admittedly very controversial, is that it's the idea that knowledge excludes the 'easy possibility' of error, in the sense that there is at least one close possible world in which one forms that belief but it is not true. Call this constraint on knowledge *safety*.⁵ The vast majority of the worlds that are close to the actual world in the relevant respects—one buys a ticket, the initial conditions of the draw are more or less the same, and so on—are worlds in which one's ticket has lost, and so worlds in which one's belief is true. That is, I suggest, at least a partial explanation of why we judge that it's not a matter of luck that one's belief is true.

But crucially not all the close worlds are ones in which one's ticket loses, and I hold that it's this feature of lotteries that makes us reluctant to attribute knowledge.⁶

I have argued that lottery beliefs aren't true by luck. If we want to hold that such propositions cannot be known (before the outcome of the draw is publically announced), an alternative diagnosis is needed. I've suggested that a safety-based diagnosis is available, so long as we take care to distinguish this kind of explanation from a luck-based one. What needs stressed before we move on is that it is not essential to the arguments to follow that the reader find this safety-based diagnosis particularly plausible, or even that the reader agree that lottery propositions cannot be known, and so that there is anything here to be explained. All that I will require is that one concede that someone could reasonably endorse this safety-based diagnosis while refusing to accept that lottery beliefs are only true by luck. One does not have to accept this combination of views oneself.⁷

2. Jane's Conviction

Jane holds one of one million tickets for a fair lottery. The lottery draw has been made, and Jane's ticket was not selected, but she has yet to hear an announcement concerning the outcome. She doesn't care all that much though, since she is already convinced that her ticket is a loser. She regards this belief as justified, though not knowledge; that is, she believes her ticket will lose, believes that this belief is

justified, and believes that it nonetheless fails to count as knowledge. When asked why she holds this combination of attitudes, she replies:

All that's required for my belief to be justified is that my evidence makes its truth sufficiently likely. And my belief that my ticket is a loser clearly meets this condition. Knowledge requires more. It requires that my belief not merely be true and evidentially likely, but also *safe*; there had better be no nearby possible worlds in which that belief fails to be true. But my belief that my ticket has lost fails to meet this condition on knowledge, since there are nearby worlds in which my ticket has won, and so in which my belief that my ticket is a loser is false. This doesn't make the truth of my belief a matter of luck, since the presence of nearby worlds in which my ticket wins does make it a matter of luck that my ticket has lost.

We might object to various aspects of Jane's position. Perhaps we think that justification requires more (or something other) than evidential likelihood, and so that she is wrong to regard her belief that her ticket has lost as justified (Smith, 2010). Perhaps we think that the safety condition she takes knowledge to impose is too demanding. Or perhaps we will want to dispute her suggestion that it's not merely a matter of luck that her belief is true (though I hope the argument of the previous section will at least give one pause). Still, even if we regard Jane as holding mistaken views about substantive issues in epistemology, it is not clear on what grounds we would regard her or her belief that her ticket has lost as unreasonable

or irrational—as incongruous, in my terminology.⁸ Jane seems to have a relatively stable, consistent, coherent picture of the epistemic status of lottery propositions, one that a number of epistemologists will find attractive given their views about knowledge and justification. Indeed, her stance seems to be one of relative epistemic humility, motivated by reflection on the demands of knowledge, and how they contrast with the demands of justification.

The verdict that Jane’s conviction may be congruous clashes with the one mandated by a number of theses linking belief and knowledge that have been put forward in the literature, in the spirit of the reorientation towards their relationship described in the introduction. In the next four sections, I’ll introduce four candidates and argue that we have no real reason to accept any of them, and so no reason to reconsider our initial verdict about whether Jane’s attitudes are congruous.⁹

3. Treating One’s Beliefs as Knowledge

Jonathan Adler (2002, pp 36) and Timothy Williamson (2000, pp 46-7) have each proposed that one treats one’s beliefs as knowledge. In order to evaluate this proposal, we first need to pin down what it claims. On the simplest account, to treat one’s belief that P as knowledge is just to believe that one knows P. So understood, Adler and Williamson’s claim entails that our verdict on the case presented in the previous section must be incorrect. Jane cannot both believe that her ticket has lost and that this is something she fails to know without incongruity, since if she believes

her ticket has lost she also believes that she knows that her ticket has lost, and so has manifestly contradictory beliefs about whether she knows that her ticket has lost. However, on this interpretation the claim that we treat each of our beliefs as knowledge is hopeless. As Williamson points out in a different context (2007, pp 272fn13), on this reading the claim entails that having any belief requires one to have infinitely many other beliefs of increasing complexity.

Williamson (2000, pp 47) suggests instead that to treat one's beliefs as knowledge is to be disposed to rely upon one's beliefs in practical reasoning. But it's implausible that we do treat *all* of our beliefs in this fashion. We may often be reluctant to rely on lottery propositions as premises in our practical reasoning, and yet it seems that we may believe them nonetheless; to adapt an example from Hawthorne (2004), I might believe that my ticket will lose, and yet be unwilling to employ this as a premise when deciding whether to sell my ticket for a penny. At the very least, we need to see some argument before we should conclude that we don't regularly believe such things. So even if it's plausible that to treat one's belief that P as knowledge is to be disposed to rely upon P as a premise in one's practical reasoning, this doesn't seem to be how we treat our beliefs in general.

This objection may miss at least one of its intended targets. Adler actually proposes that we treat our *full* beliefs as knowledge, where full belief contrasts with 'believing it strongly or to a high degree' (2002, pp 36). It might now be suggested that we don't *fully* believe lottery propositions, and so my objection in the previous

paragraph fails. However, I doubt this suggestion suffices to see off my objection. First, the distinction between fully believing something and merely believing it to a high degree is vague. That doesn't render it unserviceable or insignificant of course, but it should make us nervous about putting as heavy weight on it as the suggestion under consideration does. Second, and much more importantly, any initial appeal of the claim that we don't ever fully believe lottery propositions evaporates once we recall the variants discussed by Vogel and Hawthorne, mentioned above in section 1. I think I fully believe that my car hasn't been stolen overnight—or at least, I'm as confident about that as I am about most of my other beliefs about contingent matters. Unless the proposal is that full belief is a state we rarely succeed in getting ourselves into, I have a hard time seeing why we should hold that I don't fully believe that my car hasn't been stolen. So we're owed an account of what distinguishes my belief that my ticket will lose from my belief that my car hasn't been stolen, such that we might be warranted in taking the latter, but not the former, to be a full belief. I don't claim to have ruled out the possibility of such an account, but it seems to me that we can justifiably remain sceptical.

4. Rational Commitment

Michael Huemer (2007, pp 145) also argues against the claim that one treats one's beliefs as knowledge, citing the Unger of *Ignorance* (1975) as a counterexample. Huemer suggests instead that, although one may not take one's beliefs as knowledge, one is rationally committed to doing so, unhelpfully labeling this

principle the 'Knowledge Norm for Belief' (a label which is standardly used for the principle to be discussed in the next section). This principle clearly entails that Jane is irrational in believing that her ticket has lost, but in failing to regard this belief as knowledge. So either our earlier verdict on that case or Huemer's principle has to go.

Huemer supports his principle with the premise that if one consciously believes P and one reflects on whether one's belief is 'epistemically acceptable', then one is rationally committed to 'comprehensively, epistemically endorsing' one's belief (2007, pp 148). As Huemer understands this premise, it entails that Jane is irrational if she continues to believe P while recognizing that her belief could easily have been false. But I see no reason whatsoever to accept the premise, read in this strong a manner, nor does Huemer offer any, aside from suggesting that it forms part of a 'satisfying account of why the Knowledge Norm for Belief should hold' (2007, pp 149).¹⁰

5. The Knowledge Norm of Belief

A related proposal to Huemer's is that belief is governed by the norm that one ought only believe what one knows; following the standard usage in the literature, this is the principle that we shall call the *knowledge norm of belief*. This proposal has found a surprisingly large number of adherents recently, and so I will spend rather longer on it than I have on the others.¹¹ For my own part, I find it completely implausible. It

entails that the subjects in Gettier cases ought not believe the propositions in question, and I find this very hard to swallow. Of course, defenders of the account will be willing to bite this bullet, and they will be able to avail themselves of the same defensive move made by proponents of the knowledge norm of assertion (see, for example, Williamson (2000, pp 257) and DeRose (2002, pp 180)). We may distinguish between *properly* believing P, in the sense that one has met the norm of belief, and *reasonably* believing P, in the sense that one reasonably takes oneself to have met the norm of belief. Our sense that the subject in a Gettier case has believed well is to be put down to the fact that they believed what it was reasonable for them to believe; nonetheless, they believed something it was improper for them to believe.¹²

But even if this line works for Gettier cases, it gives the wrong verdict on Jane. Recall from section 2 that Jane believes that she does not know that her lottery ticket has lost because she thinks that such a belief could too easily be false, but she believes that her belief that her ticket has lost is both true and justified. Her belief that her ticket has lost seems to fail to comply with the knowledge norm of belief, or so let us assume with its proponents. More importantly, she will presumably not believe that her belief is knowledgeable, given that it is her considered view that it is not knowledgeable. Since she does not reasonably believe that she knows that her ticket has lost, her belief is not only improper but also *unreasonable* by the lights of the proposal introduced in the previous paragraph. Supplemented with that proposal, the knowledge norm of belief entails that the kind of epistemic humility involved in

Jane's position renders it improper *and* unreasonable for her to believe the propositions in question. So Jane cannot congruously believe both that her ticket has lost and that this isn't something she knows.

I've suggested that this is the wrong conclusion to reach about this case. But I have also conceded that judgments about such cases can be overturned in the face of sufficient theoretical pressure, and this conclusion is one we would just have to learn to live with if there were really compelling arguments to accept the knowledge norm of belief. So it is worth considering what can be said in its favor.

First, one might offer an abductive argument parallel to that offered by Williamson (2000, chapter 11) in favor of the knowledge norm of assertion. But the abductive argument for the knowledge norm of assertion starts from the contention that assertions of lottery propositions and epistemic Moorean assertions—assertions of the form 'P, but I don't know that P'—are improper. The parallel claims concerning belief can hardly be taken as data here.¹³

Perhaps for this reason, defenders of the knowledge norm of belief have tended to argue for it in a rather indirect fashion, first arguing for the knowledge account of assertion, and then relating belief to assertion in such a way that we are compelled to say that the norm of belief must be at least as strong as the norm of assertion. In this section I'll concede the knowledge norm of assertion for the sake of argument

(though I will come back to it towards the end of the paper), and examine whether we can reach the knowledge norm of belief from that starting point.

In this connection, Williamson (2000, pp 255) and Adler (2002) have made claims to the effect that belief is the inner correlate of assertion, but it is difficult to see how a compelling argument for a principle as controversial as the knowledge norm of belief could be forthcoming from that direction. I'll focus here on Adler's discussion, since he is rather more explicit than Williamson. I'll then briefly turn to an argument for a related claim due to Michael Dummett.

Adler argues that belief is a species of assertion, namely subvocalized assertion to oneself. Call this thesis **BSA**.¹⁴ The thought is that if belief is a species of assertion, and assertion is governed by a knowledge norm, then belief will be governed by a knowledge norm too. Adler presents twenty points of comparison between belief and assertion that, taken collectively, are taken to support an inference to the best explanation argument in favor of **BSA**. But as far as I can determine, **BSA** finds no support from the considerations Adler offers. I will not attempt to engage all twenty of Adler's points here, contenting myself with focusing on the most significant.

Some of the considerations Adler discusses don't seem to support **BSA** at all. For example, it is hard to see how the fact that both 'assertion' and 'belief' display a kind of act/object ambiguity should lend the slightest credibility to the claim that belief (act) is a species of assertion (act). Likewise, the observation that both unqualified

assertion and full belief are ‘common, pervasive, and ordinary’ (2002, pp 277) does not seem to speak in **BSA**’s favor at all. It is not that such considerations require supplementation. They are simply dialectically inert.

Moreover, many of Adler’s claimed points of parallel are rather loose. For example, we are told that assertion is ‘subject to demands on the social activity of conversation’ (2002, pp 277). The analogue is that belief ‘is constantly subject to multiple interests, influences, and mental and social demands’. But virtually any speech act and virtually any mental state could be paired off in this fashion. There is no distinctive parallel between assertion and belief here. Again, Adler suggests (2002, pp 276) that assertion of an epistemically qualified statement is ‘not fully successful’, in the following sense:

If Sally asserts to Harry “I am pretty sure that p ,” Harry will still transmit this as ‘Sally says that she is pretty sure that p ’ not “I am pretty sure that p .” Not so for (unqualified) assertion.

It is unclear what status is being claimed for this point, and so its truth is hard to assess. But let us suppose that it is correct. Adler offers the following supposedly parallel point concerning belief:

Partial belief (suspension of judgment) is unsatisfying, for propositions that interest the believer. He undertakes inquiry to seek resolution in full belief. (Adler 2002, pp 276 (typo removed))

It is a real stretch to see this as any kind of close analogue of the prior point concerning assertion. Again, the point is not that any one of these claimed parallels is insufficient to support **BSA** by itself. Adler clearly intends for us to be impressed by the cumulative effect of twenty considerations all pointing in the same direction, rather than for us to take him as having offered twenty self-contained arguments for the same conclusion. The problem is that it is hard to see how any kind of argument for a claim as strong and implausible as **BSA** might be based on such considerations.

Adler suggests that the ‘transparency’ of both belief and assertion is the ‘heart’ of the parallel between them (2002, pp 193). Here’s is how Adler cashes out the transparency of assertion:

Assertions are put forward as true. The content alone is put forward, detached from the speaker’s attitude. (2002, pp 274)

And here is the supposedly parallel point concerning belief:

The normal way to activate one’s belief that *p*, as in guiding action, is to take it to be the case that *p*, detached from one’s attitude of believing. So the

normal role of the belief that *p* is as directing the believer to *p* (the world) itself, not one's attitude toward *p*. (2002, pp 274)

As Adler puts the thought earlier in the book (2002, pp 11), from a first-person point of view, the way one believes things to be is the way the world is. Likewise, in asserting *P*, without adding hedges or qualifications, one puts that forward as how things are, not as how one takes things to be.

But it is strange to think of what Adler calls the transparency of assertion as a close analogue of the transparency of belief. For the transparency of belief, as Adler describes it, is essentially *first-personal*, in a way that the content of one's assertions being 'detached' from one's attitudes—however we manage to make sense of that idea—is not. One treats what one believes as how the world actually is; one 'sees through one's attitude to the world' as Adler puts the point (2002, pp 11). But naturally it is only one's own attitudes that one finds transparent to the world in this way. There is no such first-person/third-person asymmetry concerning whether the content of an assertion is detached from the attitudes of the asserter. For this reason, one has to suspect that Adler has applied a common label, 'transparency', to two quite different phenomena. The 'heart' of Adler's parallel between assertion and belief turns out to give way to another difference between the two.

Let us turn finally to the most interesting of the claimed points of parallel. Adler notes (2002, pp 275) that just as an assertion of a statement of the form '*P*, but I

don't believe that *P*' strikes us as contradictory, there seems to be something inherently wrong about believing something of the form *P but I don't believe that P*. This is an important observation.¹⁵ However, we should note that the two versions of Moore's paradox do not seem to arise independently of one another. Rather, it is natural to suggest that the inherent incongruity of Moore-paradoxical beliefs goes a long way towards explaining why the corresponding assertions sound contradictory to our ears. Indeed, Adler himself writes (2002, pp 30):

The unassertability revealed in Moore's paradox is explained by an underlying incoherence in thought.¹⁶

Now, perhaps this is not the right way to think of the relationship between the belief and the assertion versions of Moore's paradox—I'll return to this thought in section 8. But it seems like a natural picture, one that Adler himself endorses, and while it continues to exert influence it will strike us as implausible that the existence of a version of Moore's paradox at the level of thought provides a *parallel* between belief and assertion that demands explanation, of the sort provided by **BSA**.

Michael Dummett has provided a rather more direct argument for the claim that judgment is 'the interiorization of the external act of assertion' rather than assertion an 'expression of an interior act of judgment'. He writes (1971, pp 362):

The reason for viewing the two this way round is that a conventional act can be described, without circularity, as the expression of a mental state or act only if there exist non-conventional ways of expressing it; for instance, we can describe the convention governing a gesture of greeting by saying that it is used as an expression of pleasure at seeing somebody, only because it is possible to express such pleasure without the use of the conventional gesture. Most judgments, however, it would be senseless to ascribe to someone who had not a language capable of expressing them, because there is no 'natural' behaviour which, taken by itself, is enough to express those judgments.

Although the thesis Dummett is supporting here is not quite **BSA**, a version of this argument would provide motivation for **BSA** if it were successful. Reverting to 'belief' talk rather than 'judgment' talk, we may extract the following two premises from the passage just quoted:

1. A conventional act can be described as the expression of a mental state or act only if there exists a non-conventional or 'natural' way to express that mental state or act.
2. There is no non-conventional way to express many of the beliefs we would ordinarily credit to ourselves, and to others.

(2) is very plausible, (1) less so. Even if we grant both, all that follows is that no conventional act can be described as the expression of (many of) our beliefs. No conclusion about assertion follows without the further premise that assertion is a conventional act. Now, there are many senses of ‘conventional’, and no doubt assertion counts as a conventional act according to some of them (compare Bach and Harnish, 1979, pp 132-134). However, most of those who conceive of assertion as the expression of belief do not hold that assertion is a conventional act in any central or important sense.¹⁷ Dummett himself held that assertion was conventionally tied to the indicative mood.¹⁸ This particular proposal is widely held to have fallen to Davidson’s (1979) well-known objections. So we are under little pressure to concede that assertion is a conventional act, in the sense invoked in Dummett’s argument. Finally, even were we to reach the conclusion that assertion should not be thought of as the expression of belief, **BSA** does not follow without a further premise to the effect that we must accept either **BSA** or the belief-expression account of assertion. As a proponent of a belief-expression account, I’m willing to grant this disjunction (which is one reason I’ve taken such pains to show that Dummett’s argument is suspect even if one does grant this). But advocates of accounts of the relationship between assertion and belief not happily described by either disjunct have an additional point at which they can resist Dummett’s argument.

BSA remains as implausible as ever. Let us see whether one can get further without it. Bird (2007, pp 95) argues that one is warranted in believing P only if one is

warranted in asserting P to oneself, and so since the latter requires knowledge, so must the former.¹⁹ But why does Bird focus on asserting *to oneself*? Presumably because the more general claim that one is warranted in believing P only if one is warranted in asserting P makes for a markedly less plausible premise. But adherents of the knowledge account of assertion are committed to holding that one is warranted in asserting P to oneself only if one is warranted in asserting P; if one is warranted in asserting P to oneself, then one knows that P, which suffices for one to be warranted in asserting P. There's no room in the knowledge account of assertion for the utterly natural thought that asserting to oneself can be less epistemically demanding than asserting to an audience. The upshot is that the two premises of Bird's argument are somewhat in tension with each other. The claim that one is warranted in believing P only if one is warranted in asserting it to oneself is compelling enough so long as we tacitly assume that the epistemic demands on asserting to oneself are less demanding than those on 'going public'. But that's an assumption one gives up in accepting the other premise, the knowledge account of assertion. That leaves it unclear how to motivate both premises simultaneously, as Bird's argument requires.

My argument in the previous paragraph assumes that proponents of the knowledge account of assertion are committed to the claim that knowledge is not only necessary for warranted assertion, but also sufficient. This is not immediately obvious, but it is easily enough supported. Recall from above the explanation offered by defenders of the knowledge norm of assertion of our sense that subjects in

Gettier cases and subjects who assert on the basis of misleading evidence have asserted well, despite failing to know that which they assert. The idea was that even though such assertions are improper, they are reasonable because the subjects in these cases reasonably take themselves to know. But if knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for proper assertion, then reasonably taking oneself to know is a necessary but not sufficient condition for reasonable assertion, and that isn't enough to explain why we feel the subjects in the problem cases have asserted well. For this reason, when Williamson offers his explanation he explicitly assumes that knowledge is sufficient for proper assertion.²⁰ The upshot is that while the claim that knowledge is necessary for proper assertion is logically independent of the corresponding sufficiency claim, there's no plausibly maintaining the former without the latter.

We have been trying (and thus far failing) to find a compelling argument for linking belief and assertion in such a fashion as to sustain the conclusion that if the norm of assertion requires knowledge, so must the norm of belief. Let us consider one final candidate. Jonathan Sutton (2007, pp 44-48) offers an argument from the knowledge norm of assertion to the conclusion that justified belief demands knowledge. He asks us to suppose for *reductio* that Andy has an impeccably justified belief that P, but doesn't know P. Andy asserts P to Bob. Since we are assuming that the knowledge norm of assertion is correct, we can conclude that the assertion is epistemically improper, even though it expresses a belief that is impeccably justified. And this, Sutton claims, is 'exceptionally puzzling' and 'mysterious', since a

principal goal (perhaps even *the* principal goal) of asserting is the transmission of belief.

This argument is very puzzling, since it is natural to think that if one holds the knowledge account of assertion, one will also hold that the primary goal of asserting is to transmit knowledge (Williamson, 2000, pp. 267-268). Sutton preempts this response, suggesting that it would be 'bizarre' if the primary goal of assertion failed to encompass the transmission of impeccably justified beliefs (2007, pp 47). Bizarreness is in the eye of the beholder, however, and Sutton offers no argument for why we should share his reaction. For my own part, I don't find this all that bizarre. Answering the question why the transmission of knowledge, rather than mere true belief, would be the principal goal of assertion, Williamson writes (2000, pp 268-269):

The knowledge account extends the analogy between commanding and asserting. To make an assertion is to confer a responsibility (on oneself) for the truth of its content [just as issuing an order is to confer a responsibility on another to bring something about - AM]; to satisfy the rule of assertion, by having the requisite knowledge, is to discharge that responsibility, by epistemically ensuring the truth of the content. Our possession of such speech acts is no more surprising than the fact that we have a use for relations of responsibility.

The analogy Williamson is drawing here breaks down between commanding and believing. If I assert P (rather than, say, conjecturing that P), and you act as if P on that basis, you are typically entitled to complain to me, and in some circumstances demand compensation from me for any resulting damage, if P turns out not to be true. You have no such entitlements if I merely believe P; if you discern on the basis of my behavior that I believe P, and act as if P on that basis, you have no entitlement to complain or demand compensation if P proves not to be true. So the Williamsonian account of why it is the transmission of knowledge that is the primary goal of assertion, in terms of our need for relations of responsibility, offers a fairly natural explanation of why the principal goal of assertion fails to encompass the transmission of some impeccably justified beliefs; impeccably justified as they are, having such a belief does not discharge the responsibility, conferred on oneself by asserting but not by merely believing, for ensuring the truth of the content. Thus Sutton fails to substantiate his claim that it is bizarre to hold both that the principal goal of assertion is the transmission of knowledge and that some impeccably justified beliefs aren't knowledge. And so I continue to find his original argument very puzzling.²¹

Despite digging up a massive amount of terrain in this section, and despite conceding the correctness of the knowledge norm of assertion for the sake of argument, we have uncovered no compelling argument for the knowledge norm of belief. And so I conclude that we have as yet been given no good reason to overturn

our earlier verdict that Jane's belief that her lottery ticket has lost may be perfectly reasonable.

6. Knowledge as the Aim of Belief

Lastly we have the idea that knowledge, rather than mere truth or justification, is the aim of belief. Sometimes this thesis is presented in the same breath as the one discussed in the previous section (i.e. Bird (2007) and Sutton (2007)), though here I consider what independent motivation one can give the claim that knowledge is the aim of belief. I will focus on an argument for this claim recently offered by Alexander Bird.²²

Recall from section 2 that Jane believes that she is justified in believing that her lottery ticket has lost, but she also believes that she this is something she does not and cannot know. Bird (2007: 101) argues that there is a 'powerful tension [...], verging on inconsistency' in the suggestion that one can be justified in believing lottery propositions but cannot know them, since (1) knowledge is the aim of belief and since (2) a belief cannot be justified if its aim cannot be achieved. Let us concede (2) for the sake of argument. Bird's argument for the claim that belief aims at knowledge starts from the widely held claim that belief aims at truth. He notes that we would be reluctant to say that one has fulfilled the aim of belief if one believed truly on the basis of a random guess, so belief must also aim at being justified. But Bird claims that '[i]t would be odd if the norm of belief were the conjunction of two

independent factors' (2007, pp 94-95).²³ This is odd, according to Bird, because Gettier cases illustrate that 'there is nothing special about a belief that is both justified and true' (2007, pp 95). And so he contends that the best explanation of why belief aims at both truth and justification is that knowledge is the aim of belief.

But Gettier cases don't show that there is nothing special about *any* justified true beliefs that fail to amount to knowledge; at most they show that there is nothing special about any justified true beliefs that fail to be knowledge *because they have been Gettierized*. Jane's view is that, for certain propositions, knowledge cannot be the goal of inquiry since it is unattainable. We have to settle for less, but crucially Jane can insist that settling for less does not commit one to regarding subjects in Gettier cases as having met the aim of belief, since according to Jane such subjects have beliefs that are merely true by luck. Even where belief aims at less than knowledge, it aims at non-accidental truth. Bird's argument simply glosses over precisely the space that Jane occupies. No 'powerful tension' has been demonstrated.

7. When Can One Believe Something One Regards as Unknown?

We have uncovered no compelling argument for any thesis linking belief and knowledge in such a way Jane's position is revealed as contradictory, or as otherwise normatively or rationally intolerable. Our initial verdict—that even if substantially mistaken in some of her views about justification and knowledge, Jane

need not be guilty of incongruity just in virtue of holding those views—stands. Belief without knowledge need not be ‘botched’, at least not in any of the senses we have distinguished in our discussion so far. The question that remains is: under what conditions can one congruously maintain a belief while also maintaining that it is not an item of knowledge?

A version of the argument considered in the previous section provides the answer, and indeed my answer will come as no surprise in light of the discussion leading up to this point. Now, one cannot hold congruously believe *P* while regarding *P* as unknown if the reason one believes that one doesn’t know *P* is that one believes that: *P isn’t true; one doesn’t believe that P; one isn’t justified or warranted in believing P; or one is in a Gettier case with respect to P*. Let’s consider an example of each case in turn.

It is clear that one cannot congruously believe that one’s lottery ticket has lost if the reason one believes that one doesn’t know that one’s lottery ticket has lost is that one believes that the truth condition on knowledge isn’t met (i.e. one believes that it’s not true that one’s lottery ticket has lost). This would require one to believe *P* while believing that *P* is not true, and that’s manifestly incoherent.

Likewise, it is clear that one cannot congruously believe that one’s lottery ticket has lost if the reason one believes that one doesn’t know that one’s lottery ticket has lost is that one believes that the belief condition on knowledge isn’t met (i.e. one believes

that one doesn't believe that one's lottery ticket has lost). This would require one to believe P while believing that one doesn't believe P and arguably no rational subject should hold this combination of attitudes.²⁴ The reasoning concerning the justification condition on knowledge is the same, except the incongruous combination of attitudes is that one believes P and believes that one lacks justification to believe P.

The last of the four cases distinguished above is a little trickier. To believe that one is in a Gettier case with respect to P is to believe (say) that it is a matter of luck that one's belief that P is true.²⁵ But one cannot seriously believe this while regarding oneself as having justification for believing P. Consider Russell's stopped clock. If one's only potential source of justification for believing that it is one o'clock is that one's usually dependable clock reads that time, and one really believes that it's only a matter of luck that the belief one has formed on that basis is true—one believes, for instance, that the clock is stopped, and one just happened to glance at it during the one minute interval in which it will read the correct time—that undermines any belief one might have to the effect that one has justification for believing that it's one o'clock. For without independent evidence for believing that the clock is currently reading the right time, one cannot regard the fixed position of the clock's hands as giving one the slightest reason to believe that it's one o'clock. So unless one has the absurd belief that seeing the time displayed by a stopped clock, which one has no independent reason to regard as reading the correct time, can justify one in

believing that it's a particular time, one must regard oneself as lacking justification for believing that it's one o'clock.

So far we haven't found any room to believe P while believing P unknown. Each of the cases we've considered so far would require one to have an overtly incongruous attitude or combination of attitudes. But I hope it is plausible by now that, contrary to what many epistemologists might suppose, we're not done yet.²⁶ One can believe P while believing that one does not know P when (and perhaps only when²⁷) this latter belief is held on grounds that one reasonably does not take to imply: that P is false; that one doesn't after all believe that P; that one believes P but unjustifiably; or that one has been Gettierized with respect to P. And this is *precisely* Jane's situation in the example offered in section 2. She believes that her belief that her ticket has lost fails to be knowledgeable because the possibility of error is too close by, but she doesn't think that this close possibility of error has the power to suggest that she fails to meet any of the other conditions on knowledge. And, as I've tried to argue in section 1, these beliefs of hers seem like they ought to be reasonable ones for her to have; at a minimum, they seem to enjoy about as good standing as most other beliefs about controversial matters in epistemology. That's what allows her to be congruous, despite believing something that she believes to be unknown.²⁸

8. Moorean Beliefs and Assertions

I have argued that under certain conditions one can congruously believe that *P* while believing that one doesn't know *P*, those conditions being that one's reason for the latter belief does not undermine, in one's own eyes at least, one's ability to regard oneself as having met the truth, belief, justification, and anti-Gettier conditions on knowledge. In the next two sections I want to discuss the bearing of my account for issues that have been extensively discussed in recent epistemology.

We can introduce the first by considering an objection to the position I have developed. I allow that one can congruously believe that *P* while believing that one does not know *P*. But this might strike us as dangerously close to the epistemic Moorean paradoxical belief *P but I don't know P*. Such beliefs are inherently incongruous, and that might naturally give one pause when considering my central thesis.

As one might expect by now, I propose that we turn this entire argument on its head. The standard explanations of why *doxastic* Moorean beliefs—beliefs of the form *P but I don't believe P*²⁹—are inherently incongruous don't apply to these epistemic variants. For example, we might point out that if belief distributes over conjunction, then one believes *P but I don't believe P* only if one believes *P*. But the truth conditions of one's belief require that one not believe that *P*, and so one's belief cannot be true (given that one holds it). Such beliefs are inherently self-defeating in this sense.³⁰ Their epistemic counterparts are not. If belief distributes over conjunction, then one believes *P but I don't know P* only if one believes *P*. However,

this time the truth conditions of one's belief require that one not *know* P, which need not in turn require that one not believe P, and so there's no immediate clash. To obtain a clash, we need to bring in some heavyweight thesis linking belief and knowledge—theses such as the ones considered and rejected earlier in this paper. Far from consideration of epistemic Moorean beliefs revealing a problem for the position developed and defended here, my defense of that position should lead us to reconsider the claim that epistemic Moorean beliefs are inherently incongruous. For no thesis with that consequence has proved to be soundly motivated.

It should be conceded, I think, that epistemic Moorean assertions almost always strike people as absurd. Unfortunately, as noted above, this concession gives rise to a challenge to my claim that epistemic Moorean beliefs are not inherently incongruous. One standard way to explain the perceived absurdity of epistemic Moorean assertions goes via the claim that the beliefs expressed by such assertions are inherently incongruous (see, for instance, Bach (2007)). This proposed explanation is, of course, just a direct analogue of the explanation of the absurdity of assertions of the form 'P but I don't believe that P' that I expressed sympathy for in section 5 above. However, I can't accept this analogue, since I've argued that epistemic Moorean beliefs *aren't* inherently incongruous. This suggests that I must insist that we need to try a different tack, explaining the absurdity of epistemic Moorean assertions with appeal to principles that apply to the speech act of assertion, but not to the underlying beliefs. If we choose this path, we then face questions about whether familiar pragmatic principles such as Grice's

conversational maxims suffice to explain what is wrong with epistemic Moorean assertions, as Weiner (2005) and Lackey (2007) contend, or whether we have to accept something akin to the knowledge norm of assertion, as Williamson has argued.³¹ Like Williamson, I'm deeply suspicious of the claim that the pragmatic principles are up to the task, but unlike him, I don't want to be committed to the knowledge norm of assertion. So I'd like to explore how one might dodge the choice.

Let us back up to the first kind of proposal we considered, according to which the perceived absurdity of epistemic Moorean assertions is to be explained in terms of the inherent incongruity of the beliefs expressed by such assertions. What I propose is that we run essentially this story, but at one remove. Although epistemic Moorean beliefs aren't inherently incongruent, they are *typically* incongruent. The suggestion that they're incongruent as a class is an overgeneralization. More importantly, they express beliefs that are widely (though, I have argued, mistakenly) held to be inherently incongruent. I suggest that this offers an—admittedly somewhat error-theoretic—explanation of why epistemic Moorean assertions almost always strike people as absurd; people understandably though mistakenly assume that such assertions are expressions of inherently incongruous beliefs.³²

9. The Russellian Retreat and Knowledge First Epistemology

A second application of the position articulated and defended here is to the question of how seriously to take a rather unfashionable response to scepticism, suggested by

Russell in *The Problems of Philosophy*, and discussed more recently by Crispin Wright. Following Wright, let us call this response to scepticism the *Russellian Retreat* (1991, pp 88):

There is not necessarily any lasting discomfort in the claim that, contrary to our preconceptions, we have no genuine knowledge in some broad area of our thought—say in the area of theoretical science. We can live with the concession that we do not, strictly, *know* some of the things we believed ourselves to know, provided we can retain the thought that we are fully justified in accepting them. That concession is what we might call the Russellian Retreat. For Russell (1912, Chs I and II) proposed that such is exactly the message which philosophical epistemology generally has for us: we must content ourselves with probability, defeasibility and inconclusive justifications where standardly we had wanted to claim more.³³

Both Russell and Wright conceive of the Russellian Retreat as a response to sceptical arguments purporting to show that we cannot possess knowledge within a particular class of claims—for instance, contingent claims about the future, or scientific claims based on inductive inference. The hope is that making the Retreat allows us to partially absorb the blow inflicted by these arguments.

Now, the discussion here of the conditions under which one can congruously believe P while simultaneously believing P unknown suggests that an important revision to

Russell and Wright's conception of the Retreat is necessary. It's not enough that one manage to hang on to the idea that one's beliefs in propositions in the class in question are justified; one must also be able to reasonably maintain that one's beliefs are not merely true by luck. We cannot live with the idea that our epistemic faculties and practices enable us to get things right, but only as a matter of happy coincidence. This means that whether the Retreat offers any real relief from the sceptical challenges depends on the extent to which those challenges leave intact the thought that it is not a matter of luck that our epistemic faculties and practices enable us to get things right.

On some construals of the sceptical challenges, this is precisely what they target. For example, Pritchard (2005, pp 15) claims that the role of sceptical hypotheses in arguments for scepticism is to highlight the element of luck in our getting things right about the external world. However, we misunderstand the sceptical challenge if we construe it as driven by the thought that it is only a matter of luck if we get things right. The familiar sceptical scenarios depict the possibility of undetectable error about how things are with the world, but sceptics do not typically argue that this possibility shows that it's only a matter of luck that one's beliefs about the world get things right, or even that the possibility of error is modally proximate.³⁴ How we *should* understand the sceptical challenge, and the role that sceptical hypotheses play in motivating that challenge are good questions, but they are ones for another occasion.³⁵ For now, the point is just that getting clearer on the conditions under which one can maintain a justified belief while accepting that it

falls short of knowledge leads to an improved conception of what's involved in making the Retreat, and that the nature of the sceptical challenges doesn't immediately rule this out as a possible response.

What's the significance of this? A full answer to this question will also have to wait for another occasion, since whether the Russellian Retreat is either needed or defensible turns on issues concerning the precise potency of the best sceptical arguments, issues which I cannot begin to do justice to here. But let me mention one important potential upshot of what I've argued so far. Resistance to the possibility of such a Russellian Retreat in the face of scepticism is associated with the knowledge first approach to epistemology currently championed by Williamson and others.³⁶ It's easy to understand the resistance on their part. Proponents of knowledge first epistemology argue that knowledge is the most important epistemological property, and they do so partly on the basis of the claim that the norms of assertion, of belief and of practical reasoning each demand knowledge. If the threat of scepticism motivates a Russellian Retreat on a grand enough scale, then it would seem that either we are condemned to make the kinds of extreme concessions to scepticism countenanced by the Unger of *Ignorance* (1975), or knowledge cannot provide the normative standard for proper assertion, belief, and practical reasoning after all. I hope here to have cast serious doubt on the knowledge norm of belief and on the associated picture of mere true belief as a kind of 'botched' knowing, and I have (admittedly speculatively) suggested a strategy for trying to undermine the strongest argument in favor of the knowledge norm of assertion, which turns on the

contention that it provides the basis for the best explanation of the impropriety of epistemic Moorean assertions. I also hope to have planted the thought that the Russellian Retreat is worth taking more seriously than it usually is in the literature on scepticism. To the extent that I have succeeded in my aims, we should perhaps be sceptical that knowledge is as central as the proponents of knowledge first epistemology have claimed.³⁷

Concluding Remarks

I have argued that there need be nothing unreasonable or irrational—nothing incongruous, in my terminology—about believing P while simultaneously believing P to be unknown. I have constructed a case that offers my thesis a great deal of intuitive plausibility, and have argued at length that the principles one finds in the literature that would support the opposed conclusion have not been sufficiently well motivated to counterbalance that plausibility. My discussion has suggested a substantial constraint on when one can hold such a belief congruously, that constraint being that one can reasonably maintain that one's belief, while justified and true, is not merely true by luck. Finally, I have argued for three epistemologically significant upshots of my position. First, that contrary to popular misconception, epistemic Moorean beliefs are not inherently incongruous (and that perhaps the popularity of the misconception may help explain why the corresponding assertions so frequently strike people as absurd). Just as there need be nothing incongruous about believing something one believes to be unknown,

there need be nothing incongruous about believing something which is in fact unknown (indeed, unknowable). Second, that the Russellian Retreat needs revision in light of my proposed constraint on believing what one believes oneself not to know, and that so revised, the Retreat is not immediately ruled out of play as a response to the best sceptical challenges. And third, that the possibility of beating a Russellian Retreat, together with my arguments against the knowledge norm of belief (and related theses), should make us think twice about the claim that knowledge is suitable to play as central a role in epistemology as Williamson and others have insisted it must.

I said in the introduction that my principal aim here would be to cast doubt on the recent trend to try to understand belief in terms of knowledge: to think of belief as a state which aims at knowledge, and which must be irrational, unreasonable, or otherwise 'botched' if it fails to fulfill that aim. It is worth stressing that saying this much does not commit me to the viability of the traditional project of analyzing knowledge in terms of justification, truth, belief, and other such ingredients mentioned at the outset. That's an idea I do have some sympathy for, at least once much of the baggage traditionally associated with the term 'analysis' has been shed. But I concede both that the history of the past fifty or so years of epistemology and recent arguments due to Williamson and others give us considerable reason to be sceptical, and that I have accomplished nothing here that should inspire optimism that these doubts can be overcome. What I do hope to have accomplished is to have put considerable pressure on the opposed idea that belief should be understood in

terms of knowledge, and to have encouraged the thought that a better understanding of the relationship between belief and knowledge may provide the key to some longstanding epistemological problems and paradoxes.³⁸

References:

- Adler, J. E. (2002) *Belief's Own Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press)
- Bach, K. (2008) 'Applying Pragmatics to Epistemology' *Philosophical Issues* v18, pp. 69-88
- Bach, K., and Harnish, R. M. (1979) *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press)
- Baldwin, T. (2003) 'From Knowledge by Acquaintance to Knowledge by Causation' in Griffin, N., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Bird, A. (2007) 'Justified Judging' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* v74, pp. 81-110
- Coffman, E. J. (2007) 'Thinking about Luck' *Synthese* v158, pp. 385-398
- Coffman, E. J. (forthcoming) 'Two Claims About Epistemic Propriety' *Synthese*
- Cohen, S. (1998) 'Contextualist Solutions to Epistemological Problems: Scepticism, Gettier, and the Lottery' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* v76, pp. 289-306
- Dancy, J. (1985) *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing)

- Davidson, D. (1979) 'Mood and Performances' reprinted in Davidson, D. (1984) *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- DeRose, K. (2002) 'Assertion, Knowledge, and Context' *Philosophical Review* v111, pp. 167-203
- Douven, I. (2006) 'Assertion, Knowledge, and Rationality' *Philosophical Review* v115, pp. 449-485
- Dummett, M. (1981) *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (London: Duckworth)
- Foley, R. (2005) 'Justified Belief as Responsible Belief' in Steup, M., and Sosa, E., eds. *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing)
- Geach, P. T. (1957) *Mental Acts* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul)
- Gettier, E. (1963) 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' *Analysis* v23, pp. 121-123
- Green, M., and Williams, J. (2007) 'Introduction' in Green, M., and Williams, J., eds. *Moore's Paradox: New Essays on Belief, Rationality, and the First Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Hawthorne, J. (2004) *Knowledge and Lotteries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Harman, G. (1986) *Change in View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press)
- Hindriks, F. (2007) 'The Status of the Knowledge Account of Assertion' *Linguistics and Philosophy* v30, pp. 393-406
- Huemer, M. (2007) 'Moore's Paradox and the Norm of Belief' in Nuccetelli, S. and Seay, G., eds. *Themes from G. E. Moore: New Essays in Epistemology and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Huemer, M. (forthcoming) 'The Puzzle of Metacoherence' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*

- Lackey, J. (2007) 'Norms of Assertion' *Noûs* v41, pp. 594-626
- Lasonen-Aarnio, M. (2007) 'Review of Duncan Pritchard's *Epistemic Luck*' *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* v3, pp. 67-79
- Lasonen-Aarnio, M. (2008) 'Single Premise Deduction and Risk' *Philosophical Studies* v141, pp. 157-173
- Levy, N. (2009) 'What, and Where, Luck is: A Response to Jennifer Lackey' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* v87, pp. 489-497
- Lewis, D. (1996) 'Elusive Knowledge' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* v74, pp. 549-567
- Littlejohn, C. (2010) 'Moore's Paradox and Epistemic Norms' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* v88, pp. 79-100
- Matthews, G. B. (1962) 'Peter Geach on Saying Things in One's Heart' *Philosophical Review* v71, pp. 380-382
- McGlynn, A. (forthcoming) 'Interpretation and Knowledge Maximization' *Philosophical Studies*
- Nelkin, D. K. (2000) 'The Lottery Paradox, Knowledge, and Rationality' *Philosophical Review* v109, pp. 373-409
- Peirce, C. S. (1903) 'Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism' reprinted in the Peirce Edition Project, eds. (1998) *The Essential Peirce, Volume 2* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press)
- Plantinga, A. (1993) *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Pritchard, D. (2005) *Epistemic Luck* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Pritchard, D. (2007) 'Anti-Luck Epistemology' *Synthese* v158, pp. 277-297

- Pritchard, D. (2008) 'Sensitivity, Safety, and Anti-Luck Epistemology' in Greco, J., ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Skepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Russell, B. (1912) *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Williams and Norgate)
- Ryan, S. (1996) 'The Epistemic Virtues of Consistency' *Synthese* v109, pp. 121-141
- Sainsbury, R. M. (1997) 'Easy Possibilities' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* v57, pp. 907-919
- Sorensen, R. (1988) *Blindspots* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Sosa, E. (1999) 'How to Defeat Opposition to Moore' *Philosophical Perspectives* v13, pp. 141-153
- Sosa, E. (2007) *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Smith, M. (2010) 'What Else Justification Could Be' *Noûs* v44, pp. 10-31
- Stainton, R. (1997) 'What Assertion is Not' *Philosophical Studies* v85, pp. 57-73
- Strawson, P. F. (1964) 'Intention and Convention in Speech Acts' *Philosophical Review* v73, pp. 439-460
- Sutton, J. (2007) *Without Justification* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press)
- Turri, J. (2010) 'Refutation by Elimination' *Analysis* v70, pp. 35-39
- Unger, P. (1975) *Ignorance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Vogel, J. (1990) 'Are There Counterexamples to the Closure Principle?' in Roth, M. and Ross, G., eds. *Doubting: Contemporary Perspectives on Skepticism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer)
- Weiner, M. (2005) 'Must We Know What We Say?' *Philosophical Review* v114, pp. 227-251

- Williams, B. (1978) *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Sussex: Harvester Press)
- Williams, J. N. (1979) 'Moore's Paradox: One or Two?' *Analysis* v39, pp. 141-142
- Williams, J. N. (1996) 'Moorean Absurdities and the Nature of Assertion' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* v74, pp. 135-149
- Williams, J. N. (1998) 'Wittgensteinian Accounts of Moorean Absurdity' *Philosophical Studies* v92, pp. 283-306
- Williamson, T. (2000) *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Williamson, T. (2007) *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing)
- Wright, C. (1991) 'Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon' *Mind* v100, pp. 87-116
- Wright, C. (2004) 'On Epistemic Entitlement: Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free?)' *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* v78, pp. 167-212

¹ On the persistence of this assumption see, for example, Plantinga (1993, pp 6), and more recently Foley (2005).

² Levy (2009) offers an alternative way of drawing the distinction between an event being lucky, in the relevant sense, and it being fortunate. The present point could be made using Levy's characterization of what it is for an event to be fortunate rather than Pritchard's, though I find Pritchard's rather more plausible.

³ I discuss two exceptions in note 6.

⁴ Compare Pritchard (2008, pp 439-440). For two quite different arguments for the conclusion that it is a mistake to assimilate lottery cases and standard Gettier cases, see Cohen (1998) and Smith (2010).

⁵ For instance, see Sainsbury (1997), Sosa (1999), Williamson (2000) and Pritchard (2005). The final formulation of safety will have to be more complicated: see McGlynn (forthcoming) for one fairly standard way of dealing with these complications.

⁶ Pritchard (2005: 163) seems to conflate safety with the requirement that it not a matter of luck that one's belief is true, but it is clear from the context and from his other writings on this topic that he doesn't in fact make this mistake (an unfortunate choice of phrasing being responsible for any impression to the contrary). Rather, his thought is that safety is motivated by the thought that knowledge demands that it be *completely* non-lucky that one's belief is true (2005, pp 162, 2007, pp 283). But this isn't so, even if we assume the correctness of Pritchard's preferred modal account of luck. On that account, safety entails but is not entailed by the claim that knowledge demands that it be completely non-lucky that one's belief is true. Given this, it seems very plausible that the requirement that the truth of one's belief be completely free of luck is derivative from the requirement that there be no close possibility of error, not vice versa. Safety is not just an anti-luck condition on knowledge, nor can it be motivated purely by appeal to the platitude that knowledge

excludes particular kinds of luck. I lack the space to argue the point fully here. In her review of Pritchard (2005), Maria Lasonen-Aarnio (2007, pp 70) briefly makes the point I am arguing for in this section, namely that failures of the safety condition on knowledge need not involve luck. However, she fails to really appreciate the point, concluding that ‘knowledge excludes luck in a more specific, technical sense’. More recently, she presents the safety condition as a way of ‘spelling out’ the notion of luck that is incompatible with knowledge (2008, pp 162).

⁷ It is also worth noting that although I run my argument in terms of my preferred safety condition for knowledge, one could make the points I have made in this first section with appeal to a sensitivity condition, and perhaps with certain other conditions on knowledge that have been proposed (at least in part) to explain our apparent failure to know lottery propositions. Contrary to what is sometimes suggested (see for instance, Dancy, 1985, pp 40), sensitivity—like safety—isn’t just an anti-luck condition. Thanks to a referee for forcing me to clarify the role played by safety in my argument.

⁸ Actually, as a referee has stressed to me, there is one relatively clear and standard line of motivation for this conclusion. As I acknowledge later on in this paper, assertions of the form ‘P but I don’t know P’ almost always strike people as absurd. Jane doesn’t quite express her position like that, but she could, and were she to do so the perceived absurdity of her statement might reasonably be taken as indicating that the belief she expresses is incongruous. (See, for instance, Huemer (forthcoming).) I will return to this point in section 8, where I’ll argue that no conclusion about the congruity of Jane’s beliefs follows from the apparent absurdity of expressing those beliefs in the form of a Moorean conjunction.

⁹ One proposal I want to set aside before getting going is that defended in (Nelkin, 2000). Nelkin claims that one cannot rationally believe lottery propositions because (i) they are based on statistical evidence, (ii) it is irrational to posit the right sort of connection between such evidence and the truth of the proposition in question, and (iii) thinking that there’s the right sort of connection between one’s evidence and the truth of what it is evidence for is a condition on the rationality of the relevant belief. Despite Nelkin’s claims to the contrary, I worry that (iii) wildly overintellectualizes what’s involved in having a rational belief. But it’s (ii) that’s really implausible. Nelkin claims that ‘it is clear from the nature of the evidence in the lottery case that there could be no causal or explanatory connection between my evidence and the facts’ (2000, pp 398). I don’t think this is nearly as obvious as Nelkin makes out, and the claim that mistakenly positing such a connection is irrational is, to my mind at least, thrown into doubt by the fact that Nelkin (2000, pp 404-5) attributes precisely this mistake to Gilbert Harman (1986). Even if Nelkin is right that Harman is mistaken and his arguments flawed, imputing irrationality is a further, to my mind completely unwarranted step.

¹⁰ For further criticism of Huemer’s premise, see Littlejohn (2010, pp 92-3). A referee draws my attention to Huemer (forthcoming), which contains further arguments for Huemer’s norm. These more recent arguments turn on issues that will be the focus of our attention shortly, and so I’ll offer criticism once those issues are on the table, rather than attempt to squeeze the discussion into this section.

¹¹ For endorsements, see Williamson (2000), Adler (2002), Bird (2007), Hindriks (2007), Sutton (2007) and Bach (2008). Bird is very careful to distinguish norms of judgment from norms of belief, but he endorses the knowledge norm for each. I mostly gloss over this distinction in what follows to simplify my discussion.

¹² DeRose counts a reasonable assertion as proper in a secondary sense, and so for him Gettierized subjects count as secondarily proper but not primarily proper. The point to be made in the next paragraph, in DeRose’s preferred terminology, is that Jane’s belief counts as proper in neither sense, where a belief that is not secondarily proper clearly counts as incongruous in my sense.

¹³ I’ll return to epistemic variants of Moore’s paradox in section 8.

¹⁴ Despite its implausibility, claims of this sort have a surprisingly long and distinguished history. Charles Sanders Peirce suggests a related view, according to which ‘*judgment* is held to be either no more than an *assertion to oneself* or at any rate something very like that’ (1903, pp 140, emphasis in original). Similarly, Michael Dummett holds that the act of judgment ‘is the interiorization of the external act of assertion’ (1981, pp 362). Peter Geach defends the view that “x judges that man is mortal” is to be interpreted as “x says in his heart something tantamount to ‘Man is mortal’” (1957, pp 80). I discuss Dummett’s argument for his position below. For critical discussion of Geach, see

Matthews (1962). As mentioned in the text, Williamson is a little difficult to pin down on this point. Douven (2006, pp 453) attributes **BSA** to Williamson. Hindriks (2007, pp 395fn3) notes that one can read the relevant passage in Williamson as endorsing the rival thesis that assertions are expressions of belief, though I think that Douven's attribution is more plausible. Douven himself endorses both **BSA** and Adler's 'perfectly compelling case' for it (2006, pp 453). So there's independent interest in seeing what can be said in **BSA**'s favor.

¹⁵ The credit for getting epistemologists to appreciate its importance is often attributed to Sorensen (1988).

¹⁶ Adler develops this kind of response to Moore's paradox in detail in (2002, chapter 7).

¹⁷ See, for example, Strawson (1964) and Bach and Harnish (1979).

¹⁸ At least, this is how Dummett is usually read. As Stainton notes (1997, pp 60), Dummett is less than fully explicit, and so a certain amount of interpretation is required.

¹⁹ This is one place where Bird actually speaks of 'judging' where I speak of 'believing', but this doesn't make any difference to the points made in the text.

²⁰ 'Indeed, *if I am entitled to assume that knowledge warrants assertion*, then, since it is reasonable for me to believe that I know that there is snow outside, it is reasonable for me to believe that I know that there is snow outside. If it is reasonable for me to believe that I have warrant to assert that there is snow outside, then, other things being equal, it is reasonable for me to assert that there is snow outside. Thus the knowledge account can explain the reasonableness of the assertion.' (Williamson, 2000, pp 257 (emphasis added)).

²¹ Thanks to a referee for prompting me to consider Sutton's argument. Sutton's argument is further criticized in Coffman (forthcoming). I'm sympathetic to much of Coffman's discussion, though it makes some assumptions I thought it best to avoid making in the present context (for instance, that one can warrantably believe lottery propositions), which means I couldn't simply avail myself of his arguments.

²² It is worth noting that a version of the argument to be considered goes back over thirty years: see Williams (1978, 44-5).

²³ I am not entirely comfortable with shifting between talk of the aim of belief and talk of the norm of belief quite this freely, but I will let that go here, since it seems clear that reference to the norm of belief at this stage is inessential to Bird's argument.

²⁴ Interestingly, the claim that one cannot congruously believe P while believing that one does not believe P may need some qualifications. First, we may want to explicitly restrict the claim to *consciously* believing P, since it is plausible that we should allow that one need not be irrational just because one has an unconscious belief that one doesn't realize one has. Second, we may wish to leave room for cases in which one (perhaps quite reasonably) has an overly demanding account of what it take to believe P (see the references in note 30). I'll leave these complications aside here, though I return to them briefly in note 30 below.

²⁵ The argument goes through just as well if one believes that Gettier cases are better treated by a 'no-false-lemmas' diagnosis, or any other diagnosis which involves the thought that one's evidence in a Gettier case is somehow defective.

²⁶ It is worth giving some examples of such epistemologists, in addition to Williams and Bird already mentioned in section 6. Up to this point, my argument here is closely related to one offered in Littlejohn (2010) in a discussion of the epistemic version of Moore's paradox. However, Littlejohn overlooks the same possibility as Williams and Bird, namely that one might believe that one does not know P without believing that one's belief that P is false, unjustified, or Gettierized, and so does not challenge the assumption that epistemic Moorean beliefs are incongruous. This possibility is also overlooked by Ryan's (1996) 'What Else Could it Be?' argument for the conclusion that if lottery propositions aren't known, this is because the justification condition on knowledge can't be met, as has been pointed out by Nelkin (2000, pp 402fn27). More recently, Lackey (2007, pp 625n38) suggests, though does not fully endorse, a version of the 'What Else Could it Be?' argument in favor of the conclusion that if we suppose that lottery propositions cannot be known, this 'has to be' because the justification condition isn't met.

²⁷ I hedge here because of the complications mentioned in note 24.

²⁸ Huemer (forthcoming) argues as follows: ‘if, for each condition in the analysis of knowledge, any good reason for suspecting that a given belief violates that condition would serve as a defeater for that belief, then it seems that also, any good reason for doubting that a given belief constitutes knowledge must serve as a defeater for that belief. Therefore, if one has good reason to doubt that one’s belief that *P* constitutes knowledge, then one has a defeater for one’s belief that *P*’. But Huemer offers no argument that ‘for each condition in the analysis of knowledge, any good reason for suspecting that a given belief violates that condition would serve as a defeater for that belief’, arguing the point only for the uncontroversial case of the truth condition.

²⁹ Since Williams (1979) it has been standard to distinguish omissive forms of Moore’s paradox (*P* but I don’t believe *P*) from commissive forms (*P* but I believe not-*P*). The reason I ignore the commissive form here is that my focus is on epistemic versions of the paradox, and there is no commissive form of the epistemic paradox; since knowledge is factive, asserting or believing something of the form *P* but I know not-*P* is not Moorean paradoxical, as its content is outright inconsistent.

³⁰ See in particular Williams (1996) and (1998). I’m assuming that it’s more or less common ground that belief aims at truth—after all, recall that this was a premise in the argument we considered in section 6 for the rejected claim that belief also aims at knowledge—and that it is self-defeating to believe something which manifestly cannot meet the aim of belief. I’m also assuming we are dealing with the kinds of beliefs that are available on the basis of routine self-knowledge rather than, say, years of psychoanalysis, and that it is not too psychologically unrealistic to suppose that ordinary subjects are readily capable of the minimal reflection needed to see the self-defeating nature of such beliefs (on the latter assumption see, for instance, Green and Williams (2010, pp 10)). Thanks to a referee for suggesting that I clarify the assumptions being made here. This referee also reminded me that quite a number of epistemologists think that, contrary to what I have suggested here and throughout my discussion, there can be congruous doxastic Moorean beliefs—see for example Douven (2006, pp 474), Lackey (2007, pp 613-616), Coffman (forthcoming), and Turri (2010)—and so suggests on this basis that the assumption that they are inherently incongruous stands in need of defense. That’s a fair complaint, but I’m inclined not to get drawn too deeply into that debate here. While it is true that I have here defended the claim that epistemic Moorean beliefs are not inherently incongruous by contrasting such beliefs with doxastic Moorean beliefs, the principal point can be cast in the following more neutral way; *even if* one is willing to grant the assumptions needed to argue that doxastic Moorean beliefs are inherently incongruous, arguing the same point for their epistemic counterparts requires further, less plausible principles (of the sort I argued against in sections 3 through 6).

³¹ Huemer (forthcoming) argues for what he calls the knowledge norm of assertion (see section 4) by noting that epistemic Moorean assertions ‘sound akin to contradictions’, and suggesting that the simplest explanation of this is that they express inherently incongruous beliefs. He notes that there are a number of competing accounts of the absurdity of epistemic Moorean assertions, but claims that any account that relies ‘solely on facts about *assertions* or *utterances*’ has the ‘shortcoming’ that it won’t be able to explain why it’s irrational to hold the corresponding epistemic Moorean belief. As should be clear by now, I don’t think we’ve been offered any good reason to think that this is a shortcoming. In any case, the account I will offer doesn’t solely rely on facts about assertions and utterances, and so I regard Huemer’s dilemma as a false one.

³² A referee worries that my attempted explanation doesn’t explain why non-philosophers hear such assertions as absurd, given that they may not be making the assumption in question. Perhaps talk of an assumption is unhappy in this context, but I hope that the proposal will seem more promising if I say more about what I have in mind. I’m suggesting that perhaps one common reason epistemologists tend to overlook the possibility of congruous epistemic Moorean beliefs is because they overlook the possibility of true beliefs that are both justified and not true by luck, but which nonetheless aren’t knowledge. One might suggest that non-philosophers—at least those (presumably the majority) who haven’t been exposed to Gettier’s examples—will even overlook the possibility of justified true beliefs that aren’t knowledge. That’s not to suggest that such non-philosophers have ever consciously considered the claim that justified true belief suffices for knowledge, and judged it to be true. An analogy may help. It is common to find peoples’ initial reaction to the claim that there

are different sizes of infinity is to think that one has said something utterly absurd. That need not be because they explicitly hold the belief that there can only be one infinite cardinality, or anything like that. Rather, it's part of their largely implicit conception of the infinite, and it takes some explanation to convince them that there is a coherent possibility here that their implicit conception blinded them to. That, very crudely, is the kind of proposal I mean to invoke with my talk of an assumption in the text above. So I continue to think there remains some promise to my proposed explanation, even when extended to non-philosophers. That said, I do acknowledge that it is rather speculative, and so I welcome the referee's observation that there may be alternative explanations available of the absurdity of epistemic Moorean assertions that would cohere with my other arguments in this paper, since this suggests that those other arguments need not stand or fall with my speculations concerning epistemic Moorean assertions. In particular, the referee notes that Coffman (forthcoming) offers a unified account of the absurdity of both doxastic and epistemic Moorean assertions that is perfectly consistent with the beliefs expressed by such assertions being congruous.

³³ It seems likely that Wright in fact meant to refer to chapters later in the book (for instance, 13). In any case, as Baldwin notes (2003, pp 429-430) Russell himself seems characteristically in two minds about the Retreat, even within the short page-span of *The Problems of Philosophy*.

³⁴ Perhaps some forms of scepticism do make a play with the proximity of cases of error. Ernest Sosa sometimes seems to be suggesting that sceptical arguments that start from the possibility that one could be dreaming are distinctive because the dreaming scenario is a close possibility (see, for instance, Sosa 2007, lecture 1), and Williamson has suggested that judgment scepticism differs from more familiar forms of scepticism in invoking close scenarios (2007, pp 250-1). But both Sosa and Williamson contrast these examples with standard sceptical arguments invoking scenarios involving demons, envatted brains and the like.

³⁵ My own position (following Wright 2004, who is in turn inspired by Wittgenstein) is that the scenarios make vivid the fact that our ordinary practice of taking our experiences at more or less face value and forming beliefs on that basis rests on a number of *presuppositions*; one presupposes that one is not a handless brain in a vat being fed computer-generated 'experiences' when one believes that one has hands on the basis of perception, and one presupposes that the world didn't just spring into existence five minutes ago replete with traces of a longer history when one believes that one had cereal for breakfast on the basis of one's memory. The power of the sceptical challenge largely comes from the plausibility of the dual contention that if our ordinary practice is to be rational we require evidence for these presuppositions, but such evidence is not to be had.

³⁶ For example, see Williamson's discussion of the Retreat (2000: 184-6).

³⁷ Another important challenge to the possibility of the Russellian Retreat from a knowledge first perspective stems from Williamson's (2007) defense of knowledge maximization, which entails that its in the nature of beliefs that they tend be knowledgeable. I respond to this challenge in McGlynn (forthcoming).

³⁸ My thanks to Ray Buchanan, Jonathan Dancy, Federico Luzzi, Anna-Sara Malmgren, Martin Smith, Paula Sweeney, Crispin Wright, and several very constructive and helpful anonymous referees. Particular thanks to Mark Sainsbury for his feedback and encouragement.